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UNCLAS VIENNA 003383

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR CA/VO/F/P - DLOPES DA ROSA;
EUR/AGS - VVIKMANIS KELLER

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: VISA WAIVER PROGRAM: AUSTRIA PLANS TO EXTEND
THE VALIDITY OF MACHINE-READABLE PASSPORTS

REF: A) STATE 125862, B) STATE 111324, C) VIENNA 2646,
D) VIENNA 3064

1. The Ministry of Interior told Embassy informally that Austria is planning on a new approach to meet the October 26, 2005 deadline. (Travelers with valid machine-readable passports issued prior to 10/26/05 are not subject to biometric requirements, and would not be required to obtain visas). The GOA plans to introduce legislation that would allow machine-readable passports to be amended beyond the original date of expiration, meaning that the passports issued prior to 10/26/05 would remain valid, only the expiration date would be extended for one year. Once the legislation is enacted by Parliament, the expiration date could be amended upon individual application at every passport issuing office throughout Austria.

2. Since Austria only began issuing machine-readable passports early in 1996, the first group of travelers benefiting from this measure would be holders of passports that expire in January 2006. Austrian officials realize that this measure would not/not affect the old-style non-machine readable passports that will be phased out by December 31, 2005, whose bearers would in any case require visas to travel to the U.S. now.

3. As reported in Reftel D, Austria expects to be able to meet Level 2 compliance by March 2006.

Van Voorst